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SUBJECT: CZECH ELECTIONS: THE SHORT, BRUTISH, NASTY
CAMPAIGN ENDS INDECISIVELY

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[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: With the June 2-3 election only a day away, political pundits are still waffling on their predictions and a significant number of voters remain uninspired and unsure of whom to support. The choices made by this large block of still undecided voters, as high as 25% according to some surveys, will determine the outcome. Whatever the result, coalition talks are expected to be protracted and difficult. It could be many weeks or even months before we know the composition of the next government. END SUMMARY

[1](#)2. (U) In Leviathan, Hobbes said that life in a state of nature is poor, nasty, brutish, and short. Much the same could be said of the Czech election campaign that ends June 1. The official one-month campaign preceding the June 2-3 election has been labeled "smear month" by some journalists, with many potentially damaging corruption allegations and an unprecedented number of physical attacks against candidates. The charges and countercharges of unethical behavior touched many across the political spectrum. Chairman of the Green Party(SZ) Martin Bursik was accused of abusing his position in the Prague City Council in the mid 90's to gain access to public funds which were used to renovate a house he owns in a very expensive neighborhood in Prague. A week before the election, an anonymous source leaked to an internet-based news agency wiretapped recordings of conversations between opposition Civic Democrat (ODS) party chair Mirek Topolanek and two aides that might implicate ODS in attempted bribery of a parliamentarian. Just days before the election, the head of the State Police Organized Crime Unit told the Parliamentary Defense and Security Committee that the current government has ties to organized crime and has interfered in and restricted his unit's investigation into certain cases.

[1](#)3. (U) The string of physical attacks began last April when Communist MP and Deputy Party Chair Jiri Dolejs was beaten bloody by a group of young assailants while walking home from a metro stop. Then on May 1, Katerina Jacques, number two on the Green Party slate in Prague, was roughed up by

police when they arrested her for protesting against extremism at a rally. One of the policemen is facing charges. In mid-May, Health Minister David Rath was whacked on the back of the head by the former Deputy Party Chair of the opposition Civic Democrats Miroslav Macek at a national conference for dentists. The videotaped incident became for a short time one of the most watched video clips in the world on Google. On May 29, Social Democrat deputy and candidate from Pardubice was attacked while walking home from a neighborhood pub.

¶4. (U) Pundits have different views on the impact of the attacks and corruption charges. Some feel the allegations against the Prime Minister must have some negative effect on support for his Social Democrat party (CSSD) and could put an end to their eight-year rule. Others point to the numbing effect the many scandalous charges have had. This group of observers says the violence and mudslinging will put voters off, lowering the overall turnout and possibly even strengthening the share of the vote taken by parties with disciplined bases, such as the Communists (KSCM) and the Christian Democrats (KDU-CSL). It is unclear whether the Communists, who have been in a de facto partnership with the Social Democrats for nearly a year, will again enjoy the protest vote this year, or whether those votes will go to new parties such as the Greens or the Independents/European Democrats (SNK-ED), both of whom are campaigning for change.

¶5. (U) A serious obstacle to predicting the election outcome is that Czech opinion surveys are notoriously unreliable, and possibly even intentionally so, since most agencies also take commissions from political parties to do work in

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addition to the polls on voter preferences. For example, in the 2002 election, a small party for pensioners was drawing 11% just days before the election, but finished just above 2%, widely missing the 5% threshold for entry into Parliament. In the final week before this year's election, one poll had the Civic Democrats winning by more than 6% over the Social Democrats. The same day, another poll had the ODS losing to the Social Democrats by 1%. One poll also had the Christian Democrats at 9%, making them a strong choice for a coalition junior partner, while another poll had them receiving only 4.6% and failing to make it into Parliament at all. Poll results on support for the Communist party are also untrustworthy as people are still reluctant to openly acknowledge their support for the party.

¶6. (U) Weather is another factor that will likely influence voter turnout and the final outcome. In summer months, many of the well-to-do urbanites, particularly those who live in apartments and own cars, like to leave the city for their country cottages. Rush hour usually starts about noon on Fridays. Since polls are open 2:00pm - 10:00pm on Friday, June 2, and again 8:00am - 2:00pm on Saturday, June 3, going to the country cottage means not going to the polls. Conversely, bad weather that keeps people from going to the countryside can make it more likely for Prague residents, who disproportionately support the Civic Democrats and oppose the Communists, to vote. The weather forecast for Friday is a high of 57 and rain. Showers and a high of 60 are predicted for Saturday. This should help the Civic Democrats in Prague, its stronghold.

¶7. (SBU) COMMENT: Exit polls will begin at 2:00 pm local on June 3 when the polls close. Preliminary election results are expected to be released as early as 10:30 pm local on June 3. It is unlikely that this weekend's vote will produce a clear, strong winner that is able to quickly form a majority coalition government. As reported ref G, we see few signs that the upcoming elections will produce a government that is either stronger than recent governments have been, or one that is better able to connect with its citizens. Rather, we expect a close election that will be followed by many weeks of closed-door negotiations between party leaders and the President, who continues to state his preference for a majority coalition of like-minded parties, however unlikely this is.

¶8. (SBU) COMMENT CONTINUED: In light of the closeness of the race, the high number of undecided voters, and the number of unpredictable variables, several outcomes are still possible. The three most probable scenarios are a right-of-center coalition of the Civic Democrats, the Christian Democrats, and the Green Party; a grand coalition of the Civic Democrats and the Social Democrats; and a minority Social Democrat government supported in the initial vote of confidence by the Communist Party. None of these scenarios would result in significant changes to Czech foreign policy or on bilateral relations with the U.S., although the last scenario involving the communists would be least pro-NATO, pro-EU, and pro-business. However, as PM Paroubek recently emphasized, to involve the Communist Party fully in the political system, they would have to accept NATO and EU membership, show fiscal responsibility, own up to the past "sins" of the Communist party.
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